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Building Strong Army Communities

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BUILDING STRONG ARMY COMMUNITIES

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Requirement:

To support The Army Family Action Plans (1984-1990) by identifying the elements that constitute a strong Army community and providing practical suggestions on how communities can be improved.

Procedure:

The findings from an extensive review of the literature were summarized to determine the most important factors contributing to well-being of military families and communities and those programs that are effective in helping families and soldiers to cope.

Findings:

A strong community is one in which individual, family and community needs are met. These needs are addressed through both informal and formal support systems. The components of a strong community include: (1) informal support systems that allow personal relationships to develop; (2) community leaders who allow members to influence their decisions and who are responsive to family needs; (3) support services that are of sufficiently high quality; (4) a work environment that provides security and satisfaction; (5) a physical environment that is pleasant and encourages pride; and (6) support programs that are of high quality and well known to community members.

Utilization of Findings:

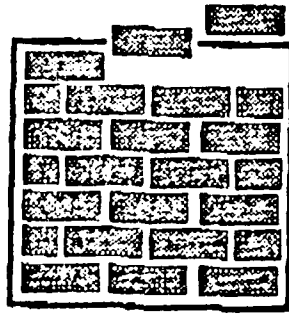
The Army sponsor of this research effort, the U.S. Army Community and Family Support Center (CFSC), reviewed and approved an earlier draft of this report. Their comments indicate that the contents of this report will be useful in revising Army programs and policies.

BUILDING STRONG ARMY COMMUNITIES

CONTENTS

| | Page |
|--|------|
| The Why and How | 1 |
| Characteristics of Support Systems | 3 |
| Informal Support | 3 |
| Formal Support | 5 |
| Components of a Strong Community | 7 |
| Informal Support | 7 |
| Community Leadership | 8 |
| Services | 9 |
| Work | 10 |
| Physical Environment | 11 |
| Support Programs | 11 |
| Prevention and Wellness Programs | 12 |
| Therapy and Treatment Programs | 14 |
| Blueprint for Building a Strong Army Community | 18 |
| Informal Support | 20 |
| Community Leadership | 21 |
| Services | 21 |
| Support Programs | 22 |
| Work | 22 |
| Physical Environment | 23 |
| References | 25 |

BUILDING STRONG ARMY COMMUNITIES



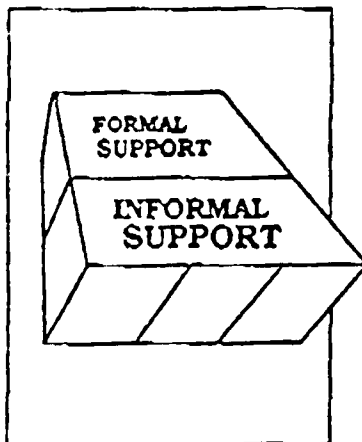
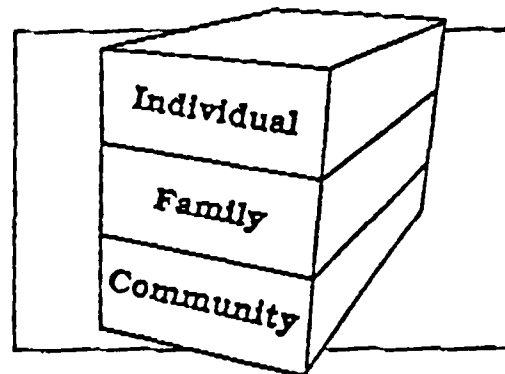
The Why and How

The quality of a community has a tremendous effect upon the lives of its citizens. Community variables have been directly and indirectly linked to spouse support for the military members, quality of life, retention decisions and overall family wellness. Concern over Army communities has become a central issue among Army leadership. There has been a growing commitment, according to the White Paper 1983: The Army Family (Chief of Staff, U.S. Army) to make the Army "a better place to live and work, and thus, in concert, to move toward an Army of Excellence." This report summarizes the findings from an extensive review of the literature (Orthner, Early-Adams, & Pollock, in preparation). It identifies those findings and factors that contribute to the well-being of military families and communities and describes those programs that are the most effective in helping soldiers and families to cope.



A strong community is one in which every element contributes to increasing each resident's quality of life. Perceptions of an individual's quality of life revolve around a sense of well-being and the experience of life as rewarding and secure. This is achieved through the successful satisfaction of one's individual, family and community needs. It is essential that all three components are satisfied in order to build a community that contributes to an overall better quality of life.

A higher quality of life enables individuals to function more effectively as family members and employees. As needs are met, stress is reduced and individuals are better



able to manage all aspects of their lives. These needs are met through social networks--informal support--and by official organizations--formal support.

Informal support networks generally consist of immediate and extended family members, friends, neighbors, co-workers and voluntary associations such as civic clubs or churches. Basically they include those supports which are not intentionally designed or constructed.

Formal support systems include concrete services affecting the daily lives of residents, such as schools, leadership systems,

utility services, fire and police protection, community mental health, and other community services. They refer to those supports which are intentionally designed by the community for the community.

Individual, family and community needs depend on both formal and informal support for fulfillment. Some of these connections are more obvious than others. The community at large, for example, has a need for facilities where recreation and leisure activities can take place. Through formal support, community leadership or post recreation services, a recreation facility is often established. However, at the family level, needs can be overlooked while family situations are not taken into account by recreation services. While individual needs may be met, they may also adversely affect the family. The recreation schedule, for instance, needs to be designed to enhance a family's time together, not detract from it.

Every community decision also influences both individuals and families. The issues specific to each post, therefore, need to be evaluated on the bases of their implications for all three levels of needs. The exact relationship between each of these elements is still not certain, but quality of life is clearly influenced by the kind of support received (Orthner, Early-Adams, & Pollock, in preparation).

Characteristics of Support Systems

Research has yielded a number of important insights into support systems:

Informal Support

- People who feel they have poor informal support systems tend to

be unhappy with their community at large.

- Because formal support is usually more scarce in smaller communities, informal support is more important to these residents.
- People are more willing to invest time and energy in their community when there are strong, informal support networks present in their community.
- Because of frequent moves, informal supports for military personnel and their families may have less chance to develop, and may, therefore, need more help than in civilian communities.
- Weakened informal social supports are associated with problems such as wife abuse, child abuse, delinquency, drug abuse, alcoholism, and poor physical and mental health.
- Men usually have weaker informal supports than women. Men tend to make more acquaintances than friends and have few close, confidence-sharing relationships.
- Women are also vulnerable to low support at different stages of the life cycle, particularly women with young children or single mothers.
- Residents with effective social support networks may develop a stronger attachment to a community and perceive a higher quality of life than residents where network ties are weak or ineffective.

Informal support networks, as mentioned earlier, have vital influences across all three need levels: Communities whose residents have stronger informal supports yields higher levels of

satisfaction and greater involvement in community affairs. Quality of family life is highly affected by the type and quality of the informal supports of its members. Individuals, as noted above, have much to gain from strong informal supports (Orthner, Early-Adams, & Pollock, in preparation).

Formal Support

Formal support systems may be more important for military families than for civilian families. Military families may have more difficulty establishing informal supports because of frequent transfers and the isolated nature of some posts. Formal support can replace some functions of informal systems where these do not exist or are weak. For example, child care facilities can greatly assist young parents whose informal networks are not sufficient to supply them with baby-sitters and other care givers.

The degree of formal support needed in a community is dependent upon a variety of conditions in the community, including the availability of informal supports. Research has suggested a number of general conclusions regarding formal supports (Orthner, Early-Adams, & Pollock, in preparation).

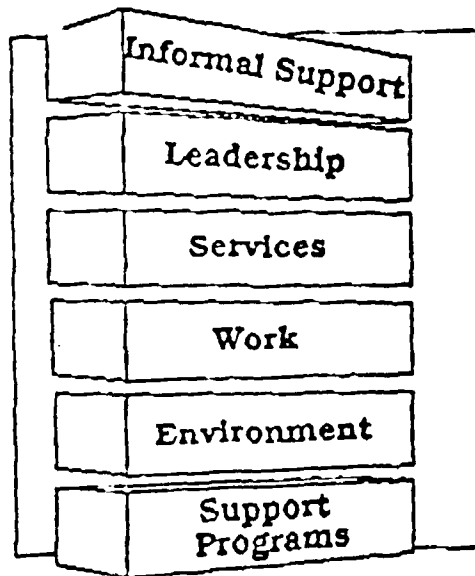
- The ability of a community to provide basic services is very important to community satisfaction.
- The community satisfaction of younger residents is more dependent on the adequacy of community services than is that of older residents.
- Most people want to have an influence in making community decisions. Younger soldiers and citizens often feel helpless in influencing leaders on community issues.

- Awareness of support is very uneven. Those most needy tend to be the most unaware.
- Support services tend to have short-term positive outcomes, unless long-term reinforcements are built into the program.

In an ideal community, almost all needs would be met through informal supports. Neighbors and relatives would meet child care needs. All individuals would have strong friendship networks. No one would have an unmet need. Of course, in reality, such a community does not and probably will not exist. Therefore, society has created systems of formal supports to fill in where current informal support is lacking. Every community and every individual varies in how much formal support is needed. It is vital that each community determine the intensity of formal support required to fill the deficit left by inadequate informal supports. It has been recently found that the number of formal supports has increased due to: (a) decreases in informal support by families and neighbors, (b) greater specialization by health and human services professionals, (c) growing recognition of special individual and family needs, and (d) pressure from family support groups such as the National Military Family Association (Orthner, Early-Adams, & Pollock, in preparation). Because of these changes, community leaders today must be more involved than ever before in developing and maintaining effective formal support services and agencies.



Components of A Strong Community



In order to build a strong community six components are necessary. Each component has implications for each need level--the individual, the family and the community at large and, therefore, for the general quality of life.

Community leadership, services, support programs, work and physical environment comprise the formal support system which either strengthens or replaces informal support.

Informal Support

No community could survive without a system of informal support (Gottlieb, 1983). Even in a community where the formal support is exceptional, individuals must have an informal support system. There are aspects of informal support, such as emotional

fulfillment and friendship, which can not be replaced by formal supports (House, 1981). It should be noted, however, that formal support can contribute to building stronger informal supports. Recreation programs, for instance, can be designed to increase the number and frequency of social contacts among participants.

Informal support, therefore, is a vital part of any community and though it is not directly controlled by community leaders, it certainly cannot be ignored by a community. Every effort should be made to contribute to, not distract from, informal supports. *Every community decision, then, must be evaluated according to how it influences individual, family and community informal supports.*

Community Leadership

For any collection of individuals to function as a group, such as a community, they must have a system of rules and procedures. These allow individuals and groups to express their views, participate in decision-making, and influence their own welfare. These rules and procedures must be responsive and flexible in order to function competently, otherwise they will impede the process they are designed to facilitate (Pollock & Parham, 1987). The amount and type of participation allowed in community affairs may influence how residents experience community life.

Community leaders can play a significant role in enhancing the competence of communities to solve problems or resolve issues. On a military post, leaders are not chosen by residents, but residents are nevertheless subject to their leadership. In building the quality of life for soldiers and their families it is particularly important, therefore, for military leaders to take steps toward building a system of procedures that is clearly and visibly responsive to the needs of individuals, families, and the community at large. In one recent investigation, the belief that

installation leaders are responsive to family needs was the most important predictor of their perception of the quality of life in the military (Orthner & Pittman, 1986). Community leadership on a military post has the unique ability to influence such issues as the effect of work schedule on family life, sufficient social programs, adequate housing, effective basic services and many more. *The successful community leader, then, strives to be aware of individual and family needs by gathering information in a variety of ways, particularly by being accessible to all community residents, and meets those needs through a responsive system of formal support.*

Services

As mentioned earlier, research has shown that the ability of a community to provide basic services is a greater predictor of community satisfaction than the quality of those services (Orthner, Devall, & Stawarski, in preparation). In other words, community satisfaction is low if basic services are not provided, but after these basic needs are met, increasing the quality of services, does not have as dramatic an affect on community satisfaction. Still, very high quality services, can contribute to satisfaction especially in recreation, housing, medical care, and family support programs and enhance quality of life (Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense, 1988).

These basic services include water and sewer utilities, police and fire protection, waste management, transportation, and schools. Residents expect these needs to be met by their community, and when these services are very poor or absent, satisfaction decreases. It is vital, then, that these services are provided and that they are visible to residents.

Another important community service is referred to as **supplies**. Every community must provide a means by which residents can obtain goods such as clothing and food. In most communities supplies are

not a concern to leadership since free enterprise usually fills the need. In isolated areas, however, most notably military installations, the need to give attention to supplies becomes crucial for residents' quality of life. In planning to build a strong community, leadership must ensure that a sufficient and accessible supply base is available.

Work

The promise of an economic future is vital to an individual's sense of well-being. A community must offer sufficient work opportunities for its citizens in order to provide this economic security. Beyond basic employment, a sense of satisfaction with work is important for one's overall quality of life (Andrew & Whitley, 1974).

On a military installation, a soldier's job is basically secure but job satisfaction is far from guaranteed. In building a high quality of life, there must be not only a sense of satisfaction with one's job but also with the opportunity of growth through it. A sense of satisfaction with both daily job tasks and opportunity for future growth contribute to a soldier's quality of life. *Army leaders need to recognize the effects of job satisfaction on overall satisfaction with military life.*

Spouses and other family members also need to be considered parts of a community's work force. Sufficient work opportunities should be available to military spouses who want and need to work. Jobs offer spouses financial relief, personal fulfillment and resolution of the "bored housewife" syndrome. *Again, isolated posts appear to produce the greatest challenge, although community dissatisfaction can occur wherever spouses are unable to find satisfactory employment.*

Physical Environment

The final component of any community is comprised of its physical dimensions. These include the climate and terrain, the physical layout and the demographics of the community.

The climate and terrain of an area can have surprisingly important effects on community satisfaction because they influence such diverse areas as one's finances, emotions, comfort, health and safety. Though not under the control of community leaders, climate and terrain need to be considered as a significant factor influencing quality of life.

The physical layout of a community includes such factors as the general appearance of the community, the density of buildings, the size of the community, and how conveniently shops, schools, or other services are located to one's home. The physical attractiveness of a community has been found to be a good predictor of community satisfaction (Widgery, 1982). *The aesthetic quality of community influences residents' attachment to and pride in their community.* Extremely high density of buildings sometimes has the effect of drawing people inward to their private space while extremely low density provides very few neighbors with whom to relate.

Support Programs

Support programs offer opportunities for people to develop themselves and their relationships in ways that make the community stronger and the work environment better. They can be considered under two categories:

- (1) Prevention and wellness programs
- (2) Therapy and treatment programs

Prevention and Wellness Programs

These programs were developed for those individuals and families that are not in serious difficulty, but whose members wish somehow to make their personal relationships more mutually satisfying. All of the military services have invested substantial resources in order to establish personnel and community support programs in this area. The following are major types of programs that have been targeted toward military families.

Marital Enrichment is an educational and preventative approach to relationship enhancement. The primary purpose of marital enrichment programs to assist couples in achieving or increasing individual self-awareness as well as awareness of the strengths and growth potential of the partner and the marriage (Mace & Mace, 1976). Research suggests improvement in these programs can be made by increasing awareness of their availability and building follow-up sessions into the programs (Orthner & Bowen, 1982). These programs are especially useful for young couples and those couples experiencing stress on their relationship due to outside influences such as a promotion which requires longer hours of work.

Parent Education Programs are growing in popularity in both military and civilian communities. These programs vary greatly in the types of leaders used (professionals versus volunteers), program structure, program lengths (weeks versus years) and settings (group versus home-based) (Powell, 1986). Parent education programs are generally effective for those who participate. However, there is a need to develop ways of improving more parents in the programs. Specifically, those who could most benefit from the programs are typically the least likely to participate.

Financial Counseling is a process by which individuals and their families are helped to become economically independent and stable (Bratton, 1971). The service is offered through education or individual counseling. This type of program tends to be used as a last resort or after problems have become very severe. There is a need to develop more creative ways of using these services in a preventative manner and of reaching more people, especially young families.

Child Development services in the military community are provided for various reasons, including reduction in lost duty time and provision of employment opportunities for military family members (Vernez, Meredith, & Praskac, 1986). Center-based and quarters based family child care are the primary options in the military community. It is vital that community leaders determine the kinds of child care needs in their community and adjust services accordingly. The simple existence of a child care service does not guarantee that all or even most needs are being met. Since the lack of information and referral services are often the most useful for parents and the easiest to provide.

Relocation Assistance Programs are designed to assist with one of life's major stresses: moving (Catalyst, 1983). They vary from pre-move information or workshops to full assistance by sponsors for the entire family. *Military families move twice as often as their civilian counterparts and are, therefore, especially impacted by relocation issues.* Although participants generally report being helped by this service, participation rates are relatively low, suggesting a need for developing better ways of delivering the service.

Recreation and Leisure Programs make an important contribution to community satisfaction. Numerous investigations have indicated that involvement in leisure and recreational activities can be associated with a variety of benefits for individuals and families.

Specifically, these benefits include increases in employee productivity, marital satisfaction, and individual self-esteem (Allen, Bentler, & Gutek, 1985). The majority of Americans now believe that leisure is a necessity rather than a luxury.

Therapy and Treatment Programs

Therapy and Treatment Programs are designed to directly intervene in the immediate problems of community members. In the military, traditional mental health services, drug and alcohol rehabilitation programs, and social work programs are now complemented by other services such as counseling services, family advocacy and abuse programs.

Crisis Hot-lines are becoming increasingly important (Freysinger, 1987). They are used in crisis intervention for a wide variety of individuals, including victims of crime, persons with suicidal intentions, physically or emotionally abused individuals, the elderly, grieving families, persons with sexually transmitted diseases, and single parents. Crisis hot-lines can be very effective but are not yet available in all communities or well publicized on others.

Shelters are a fairly new development in the area of crisis intervention programs. They are most often described as a short-term refuge for wives and children to escape from an episode of domestic violence. Awareness of shelters is low in Army communities, although they appear to be very important as a means of reducing tensions in some households (Griffith, Lavange, Gabel, Doering, & Mahoney, 1986).

Marital and Family Therapies have experienced a significant and steady increase in use over the past decade. Marital and family therapy is very different from individually oriented intervention in that it utilizes the couple or family as the focus for intervention. Recent improvements in these techniques have resulted in substantially better treatment outcomes (Kaslow, 1987).

Alcohol and Drug Treatment programs are a large and established part of human service organizations. Programs are available on an inpatient and outpatient basis, and involve various methods from family therapy to anti-abuse programs. The most effective of these programs require self or group monitoring of the behaviors after treatment (Glaser, Greenberg, & Barrett, 1978).

Adult Individual Therapy is also offered both as an inpatient and outpatient treatment program. Most individuals receive therapy through outpatient services such as community mental health centers, private counseling clinics, and social work services.

Adult Group Therapy is used as a treatment choice for a variety of mental health problems, including substance abuse, parenting concerns, relationship problems, sexual abuse, as well as many others. Groups challenge the behavior of members, encourage more adaptive behaviors, and allow social learning to occur through imitation, modeling, or by rapid personal feedback. The economic efficiency of group therapy suggest that service providers need to be constantly on the lookout for ways of meeting needs through the formation of new groups (Smith, Glass, & Miller, 1980). Perhaps current services provided on an individual basis, such as individual therapy) could be provided through the group, thereby stretching the resources available.

Children's Treatment Programs can best be viewed on a continuum from least to most restrictive. There is an emerging philosophy

emphasizing the need to adjust services to the family rather than demanding that families conform to preexisting services, and to emphasize caring for children in the least restrictive, most normative environment (Stroul & Friedman, 1986). Services are offered on an outpatient basis (such as individual therapy or group therapy) and residential treatment.

Homebound Services are a new type of outpatient service that have arisen in recent years in response to the efforts to reduce use of residential services for children and youth. Although programs vary, they do contain some common elements: (1) they accept only families with a child that is about to be removed; (2) there is a crisis orientation and families are seen quickly; (3) staff hours are flexible and 24 hour coverage is often available; (4) no child is left in a potentially dangerous situation; (5) treatment is focused on the family; (6) staff carries small caseloads; (7) interventions are brief and time limited; and (8) a team approach is used (Friedman, 1985).

Even though the degree of effectiveness of many community social programs is still in question, the potentially significant role they can play in developing stronger family, organization and community relationships has been recognized by social scientists (Orthner, Devall, & Strawarski, in preparation). Several suggestions for increasing the effectiveness of these programs can be made. First, since public awareness of the availability of these programs is low, any program undertaken in the military needs to devote a significant amount of its resources to increasing awareness of the program within the community. Second, only short-term benefits will result from these programs unless long-term reinforcements are built into them. Follow-up contact with service providers is necessary to extend the benefits of a program past the actual program length. Finally, services need to be evaluated on a regular basis. Through a process of determining frequency of use

and effectiveness, the method of service delivery can be continuously improved. More will be mentioned about these methods later.



Blueprint for Building a Strong Army Community

Strategies for building strong military communities involve increasing the quality of life in each community. By encouraging the formation and stabilization of informal supports and supplementing these with formal supports. Army communities are better able to raise the quality of life for their soldiers. With a higher quality of life there is every reason to believe that a soldier's appraisal of Army life will be more positive. Thus, with needs met to a sufficient degree for a soldier, his/her family and his/her community, decisions for retention will likely increase. In turn, with a high level of satisfaction, soldiers and their families will contribute more toward making their community a better place to live. This will further increase their own quality of life. Furthermore, job performance should increase as a soldier's overall satisfaction with Army life increases (Campbell et al., in preparation). More than with civilians, a soldier's community life appears to be connected to work life. Characteristics of one can highly influence the other.

In a sense, the military leader concerned with improving the quality of life in a community must act as a social scientist, constantly evaluating the needs of community residents and the effectiveness of community programs. Military communities, although similar in many ways, vary from post to post. Variations are experienced in degree of isolation, work opportunities for

spouses, local school quality, quality of services, physical environment, availability of social networks and mission related assignments. Therefore, there is no such thing as the "ideal" community structure that will work everywhere. Each community must design its own system of services and programs based on anticipated and demonstrated needs. Further, not only are there variations *between* posts but needs are constantly changing *within* posts. Work opportunities in the local community fluctuate with the economy or local services improve or worsen over time; populations of military posts change; and so on. In other words, a onetime evaluation of a community's needs is not sufficient for ongoing success in building a high quality of life. Almost everyone has experienced the ineffectiveness of a program or procedure that once effectively served its purpose but presently is outdated and no longer meets its original goals.

What is needed is a process of evaluating community needs for each local community on an ongoing basis. This can be accomplished in at least two ways. Community leaders, service providers, CO's, and other knowledgeable community members, can be gathered together in a regular basis to specifically evaluate the state of the community. Input on all programs, services and needs should be gathered from all corners of the post. Second, community members should be contacted directly through a combination of written surveys and "town Meetings." Again, input is needed from all community members (various ages, races, service men and women, spouses, and other family members, etc.) regardless of their place in the community.

Through this process of regular community evaluation, a local post can design its own system of formal support that is timely and effective. Without this process of evaluation, formal support is a "shot in the dark," with community leaders simply hoping that

programs meet whatever needs are out there. The end result is duplication of some services and gaps in the delivery of others.

As mentioned earlier, many needs are common to most communities. Child care, for instance, is a need that currently permeates most American communities. What is often not known is the type and extent of the child care need. This information is gathered through the evaluation process described earlier.

To aid in the process of community assessment a general guideline of community needs follows. These are based on the six components of a strong community discussed earlier, and act as a checklist for evaluation. It is not exhaustive since each community has its own set of salient concerns. These questions, however, can serve as a guide for developing community surveys and leadership meetings.

Informal Support

- Do residents have opportunities to make new friends?
- Do residents have a network of friends to count on in time of need?
- Do residents feel isolated?
- Do families as a unit have an opportunity to develop relationships with other families and individuals?
- Are new families in the community encouraged to establish friendships?

Community Leadership

- Do residents know who to contact for help?
- Do residents feel they have an impact on community decisions?
- Do residents feel that leaders are responsive to their needs?
- Are the outcomes of community decisions readily available to residents?
- Are leaders readily available to discuss community issues with residents?
- Are there any subgroups of the community that do not feel equally adequately represented in community decisions?

Services

- Are all basic services available to all residents?
- Are all residents aware of how to obtain these services?
- Are services clearly visible to residents?
- Are there means by which residents can make suggestions for changes or improvements in services?
- Do residents feel that enough resources are being devoted to schools?
- Is there sufficient public transportation available to on-post residents?

Support Programs

- Are all residents aware of all the support programs available?
- Do support programs meet the needs of all residents or just subgroups?
- Are some programs ineffective at meeting their goals?
- Do some programs need to be eliminated or revised?
- Are there common needs that are not being met by any program?
- Are post programs duplicating services which are already effectively available in the local community?
- Are there recreation facilities and activities available for all ages and family members?
- Are all recreation programs widely used? Why not?

Work

- Are there sufficient jobs for spouses who want to work?
- Are there opportunities for other family members to work?
- Is job satisfaction on post high or low?
- Specifically, are the variations in job satisfaction temporary or are some units operating under such low morale that the whole community is affected?

Physical Environment

- Do facilities effectively consider the environment (sufficient heating and air, appropriate recreational facilities, etc.)?
- Are there affordable ways of improving the physical attractiveness of the community?
- Do housing facilities offer privacy and yet access to neighbors?
- Are residents' concerns about housing being addressed?

The military community is in the unique position of being able to design a system which contributes to an overall high quality of life. Many of the variables which contribute to quality of life are under the jurisdiction of military leaders. From general services to work schedules, military leaders are capable of creating a healthy community when given the motivation and methods for doing so. Since mobility often upsets informal supports for military families, it is vital that the added control military leaders have is exercised for the betterment of the community.

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